



Woodbury's steeped county court house reflects Scandinavian origin.



Historic marker on Route 322 in Glassboro recalls Stanger venture.

CAVALCADE OF COUNTIES:

THE



Farm scene near Mullica Hill, one of Gloucester's thriving "garden patches."

Gloucester's Soil Was Meant for the Plow Ever Since Swedish Settlers Occupied its Creek Banks 300 Years Ago. Today, Despite Industrial Inroads, Half of County's Area Is Still Under Cultivation

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

Staff photos by Porter,

POSSIBLY the most "English" of all New Jersey county names is Gloucester, yet with justice that South Jersey agricultural county might well be "Stockholm" or something equally Scandinavian. Long before English Quakers came, Swedes occupied the county creek banks, but the name "Gloucester" indicates what happened—the English moved in and moved ahead; the amiable Swedes moved over.

Except for Swedesboro on Raccoon Creek, the apparent Swedish story is gone from Gloucester—but it lives on in the strong influence the Swedes had in making the county an area of relatively small farms. Few of Gloucester's farms have ever been large; today only a handful of its 1,900 farms are more than 50 acres in size. Swedes led the way to intensive cultivation, to the truck gardening which as early as 1870 earned Gloucester a still-meaningful nickname—"Philadelphia's Garden Patch."

"New Sweden" began in 1638 on the west bank of the Delaware River near what is today Wilmington, in a region also claimed by the Dutch. For years the Dutch and Swedes struggled as fiercely as limited manpower on both sides permitted and eventually both lost, because in 1664 England accepted the Dutch surrender of the Delaware

River valley. Significantly, neither paid the slightest attention to Swedish claims.

Not that the Swedes cared much by that time. Rocky soil near Wilmington resisted their husbandry, so they slowly drifted across to the Jersey side of the Delaware—as individuals, not in colonies—to break the rich soil. Since many of them were indentured servants who had left their masters, they worried little who ruled the land—as long as they farmed it.

SWEDISH centers arose, particularly along Raccoon Creek (although as a later historian pointed out, Swedish settlements were merely scattered farms, "held together by the gossiping propensities of Swedish matrons"). Cordiality between Swedes and Quakers existed from the time the first English colonist arrived in the late 1670s; Swedes acted as interpreters when the Quakers bought land between Timber and Oldman's creeks from the Indians—and no one remembered or cared that other enterprising Indians had long before sold the same land to other Swedes.

One of the early Quakers, William Penn, showed great interest in the new colony and in 1681 seriously considered the present site of Paulsboro for the center of his vast holdings. He

(This is the eighth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Hudson County.)

GARDEN PATCH



decided the land was too low, however, and a year later turned to the higher west bank of the Delaware River to found his Philadelphia.

All West Jersey at the time revolved about Burlington, but soon the Swedes and Quakers resented the long trip to the West Jersey provincial capital. Accordingly, on May 28, 1686, representatives met at Arwames (now Gloucester city) and organized Gloucester County. Many historians maintain the representatives formed the county themselves—without action or permission of the provincial Legislature—thus making Gloucester the only county in New Jersey deriving its existence from the direct action of its people. However, other historians insist that the Legislature gave at least tacit approval to the new county.

("Old" Gloucester was a sprawling county, embodying all the present Camden, Atlantic and Gloucester counties—nearly 1,200 square miles, or about one-seventh of the state. Atlantic's founding in 1837 took 613 square miles and Camden's founding in 1844 took 225 square miles, leaving "New" Gloucester only 330 square miles.)

REPAUPO and Mullica Hill became centers of Swedish life until completion of the King's Highway to Raccoon (Swedesboro) shifted influence there in 1702. Quaker life centered in Woodbury, founded in 1683 by a member of the Wood family from Bury, England. Slowly the Quaker influence came to dominate the county.

Old-time Swedes fought to keep themselves and their children "Swedish." Establishment of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Raccoon in 1703 helped (even though the first minister, Lars Tollstadius, possessed such dubious character that in 1706 he was "bound over" to Burlington Court for getting Ole Persson's daughter into difficulties). A Repaupo school set up in 1715 perpetuated old-country language and customs for years, but "Swedishness" couldn't last.

Young Englishmen found young Swedes attractive, and vice versa, and nature took it from there. By 1750 the assimilation was so complete that few even complained when their town name of "Raccoon" was anglicized to "Swedesboro." The following year the church minister agreed to keep records in English rather than Swedish. Thus expired "New Sweden."

GLOUCESTER COUNTY assumed a two-fold importance in the Revolutionary War—its "garden patches" attracted food seekers from both armies and its strategic position just below Philadelphia made it an obvious spot for river-dominating fortifications.

Continental land agents bought a

large plot of land at Billingsport on the mouth of Mantua Creek on July 4, 1776—the first land purchased by the just-born United States of America. The infant government quickly built a fort at Billingsport in 1766, and the following year, when Philadelphia's fall seemed imminent, the army threw up Fort Mercer on the bluff at Red Bank, directly across from South Philadelphia.

Four hundred ragged and despairing Rhode Island volunteers waited behind Fort Mercer's crude walls for the attack they knew must come after the fall of Philadelphia in 1777. Finally, on October 22, 1777, 2,200 Hessians struck under cover of a river barrage from the 64-gun Augusta and

the 18-gun Merlin. Col. Christopher Green cautioned his American troops to hold their fire until the Hessians reached the walls.

A hail of musket fire and grape shot cut the Hessians viciously. They withdrew, then charged anew, only to become panicky in the face of the murderous fire. Their disorderly flight left 400 dead and wounded under the walls, including their mortally wounded commander, Col. Donop.

MEANWHILE, American guns mounted on barges sank both the Augusta and the Merlin, but not before shot from the British vessels peppered the side of James Whitall's farm.

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Monument in Red Bank Battlefield Park overlooks South Philadelphia.



King's Highway is main street in Swedesboro, one of the first settlements on Raccoon Creek.



Bridgeport terminal of the Delaware River ferry to Chester, Pa.

GLOUCESTER COUNTY

(Continued from Preceding Page)

house near Fort Mercer. Inside the house, Mrs. Anne Cooper Whittall sat calmly spinning while the battle raged outside. Suddenly a cannon ball blasted through the wall, hurtled past Mrs. Whittall into the far wall. The imperturbable Quaker picked up her wheel, went into the cellar—and continued to spin. Later, as she bound up the wounds of the Hessians, she scolded them for coming to America to butcher the colonists.

Continental troops abandoned both Fort Mercer and Billingsport within a few weeks, however, and the British held full sway over the lower Delaware—enabling Lord Cornwallis's foraging party to exploit Gloucester's gardens (whenever bold Mad Anthony Wayne didn't beat him to the harvests). Cornwallis stayed in Woodbury briefly, from November 21-24, in the home taken from Patriot John Cooper, brother of Anne Cooper Whittall.

Woodbury's emergence as Gloucester's leading town began in 1787, when the decrepit old county buildings in Gloucester town burned. The following year the cornerstone for a new court house was laid in Woodbury and county government moved to Woodbury to stay.

The village at the head of navigation on Woodbury Creek prospered even then. It took justifiable pride in its progressiveness—in its Free school, started by the Quakers in 1773; in its famed Woodbury Academy, opened in 1791; and in its Gloucester County Abolition Society, one of the nation's first such groups when founded in 1793.

AMERICA'S first airborne trip came to an end in a field near Woodbury in 1793, when Jean Pierre Francois Blanchard stepped from a balloon after a leisurely trip from Philadelphia. The smiling Frenchman bore a letter from Washington and told the cautious few who ventured near of the tumultuous sendoff Philadelphia's sophisticated populace had given less than an hour before.

Blanchard was diverting (if a mite frightening), but far more vital to Gloucester County's growth were the Stangers, seven German brothers who came from Wistar's Salem County glass works in 1775 to start the glass industry which boomed in many parts of Gloucester for more than a century.

Settling down in the dense forest at what is now Glassboro, the seven Stangers built a successful glass factory and naturally enough accepted as much Continental money as they could get. Unfortunately they had

more brains than luck, since when Congress announced in 1780 that 40 Continental dollars equalled only one gold or silver dollar the Stangers learned the sad meaning of "not worth a Continental." They went to debtors' prison and their glass works passed into the control of Col. Thomas Heston.

Eventually the Stangers returned, some of them to work for Heston and some of them to begin other plants. The Stanger success prompted other glass ventures—at first in Malaga, Williamstown and Clayton and later in Woodbury in the 1880s. All disappeared because of cheaper competition elsewhere, but while they lasted their owners prospered (partially because in the early days the owners owned almost everything in their glass villages and took back in trade what they paid out in wages).

GLOUCESTER COUNTY'S pre-Civil War social life centered in the many taverns scattered over the area—such as Clarksboro's "Death of the Fox" Inn, where sportsmen gathered to chase the elusive Reynard; the White Horse Tavern, which gave Five Points the name "Hell Town"; George Sheat's hotel in Bridgeport, where men gathered to down some grog before watching the horse races in the village streets, and the Williamsport Tavern, where boastful hunters met.

Inevitably tavern talk got round to Jonas Cattell, half-historical, half-legendary Gloucester figure whose life spanned almost a century, from 1758 to 1854.

Jonas? When 50 years old he outran an Indian in a race from Mount Holly to Woodbury. Once he walked 80 miles to Cape May, delivered a letter and returned with an answer the next day. Jonas? Why he loved fox hunting—but he traveled on foot, and the horses, riders, hounds and foxes were always more tired than Jonas. Those feats had a strong element of fact in them, but such old hunter's tales as his wrestling a 15-foot sturgeon in the Delaware prompted the disbelievers to declare that Jonas's imagination was as broad and his tongue as stretched, as his legs were swift.

Woodbury attracted hundreds of surrounding farmers on Saturday afternoons in the 1820s—to drink a little "Boston Peculiar" (New England rum), to wrestle and pitch quoits and to watch the militia drill (armed with everything from 1776 flintlocks to cornstalks). Gaiety took a back seat in 1825, however, to the talk that Camden challenged Woodbury's right to retain the county seat. Bitter wrangling engulfed the county that year



Methodist meeting ground at Pitman and auditorium (background).

before Woodbury won a victory at the polls (and, according to some, precipitated Camden County's secession in 1844).

FIRMLY established as the county seat, Woodbury rejoiced even more in 1831 when the 75-year-old dam across Woodbury Creek below the town was broken. Built in 1766, the dam long had hamstrung the village at the head of navigation. Thus, when two sloops sailed through the broken dam, crowds cheered and cannon roared a welcome. An orator enthusiastically pointed out that the tide which "ran out 75 years ago finally has run back."

Five years later a railroad stretched down from Camden to cement the county seat's destiny to Camden and Philadelphia. Nevertheless, Gloucester grew slowly, mainly because of poor roads. The county didn't even get its first turnpike until 1848, at a time when the turnpike movement was nearly a half-century old elsewhere in New Jersey.

A strong temperance movement swept over Gloucester in the two decades before the Civil War. Paradoxically, a bottle made in Glassboro for the 1840 Presidential campaign of William Henry Harrison helped popularize the word "booze." Shaped like log cabins, supposedly symbolic of Harrison's humble beginning, the bottles were filled by a Philadelphia distiller, E. C. Booz. Soon they became known as "Booz" bottles, popularizing the word "booze" which had been used as early as 1812 by Parson Weems.

In view of its long-time belief in abolition of slavery, Gloucester naturally stood solidly behind the Union cause in the Civil War. Mullica Hill even sent an all-Quaker company into active service. Immediately after the war a pressing religious fervor swept

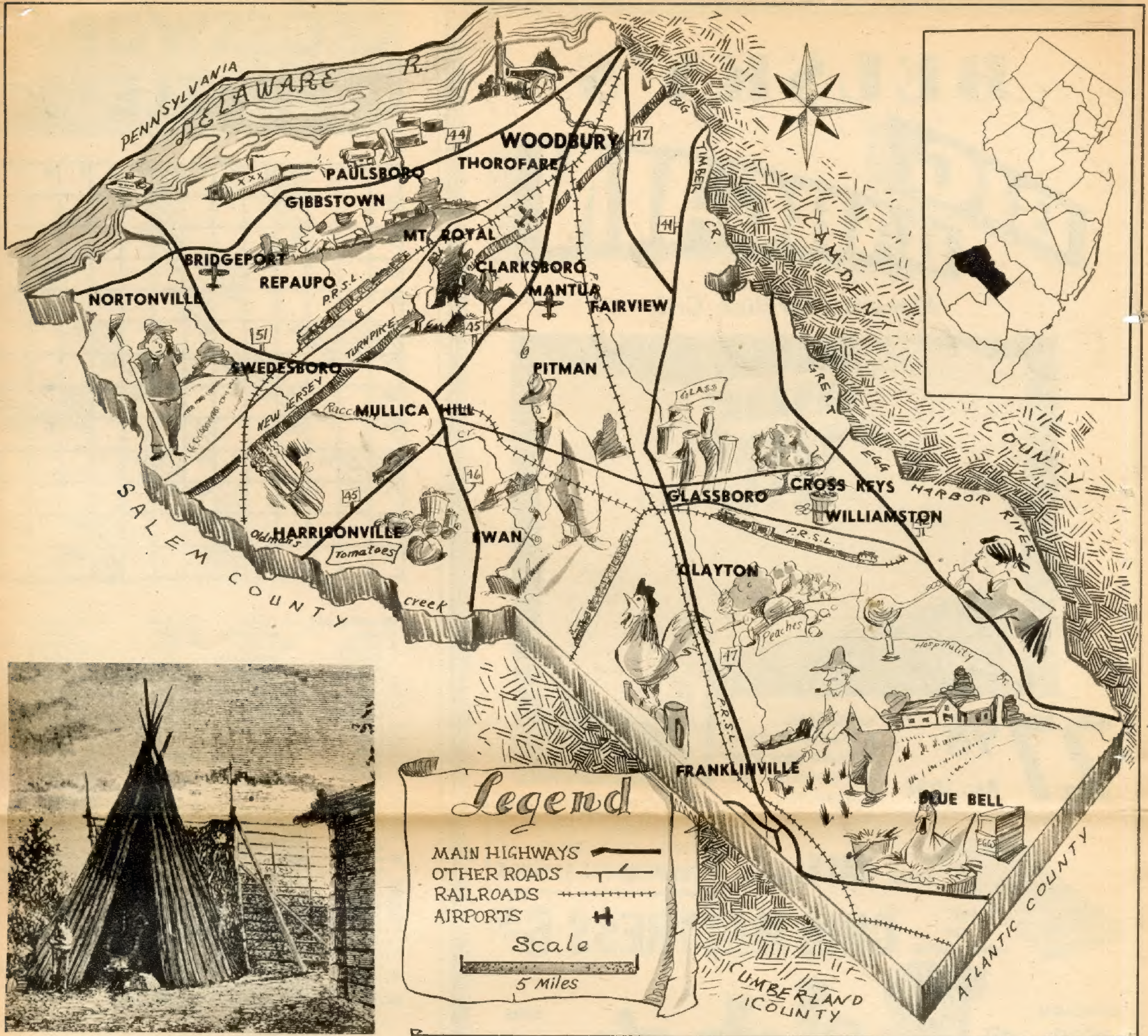
Gloucester, resulting in the establishment during the 1870s of huge camp meeting grounds at Pitman and Malaga (both of which still exist, by the way).

TWO centuries of agricultural dominance passed before two men—one a home-town boy and the other from across the river—gave Gloucester its first large-scale industrial impetus.

George G. Green, son of a county farmer, started things on a big scale in 1872 when he returned to Woodbury on Thanksgiving Day, 1872, with his new bride. He had been away several years, proving himself as a Civil War veteran, salesman and druggist. Now he was back to buy and run his father's small patent medicine business.

The Green medicines long had been known locally. "Green's August Flower" cured dyspepsia (and so on) and "Boschee's German Syrup" cured illnesses of the chest (and so on). George G. Green scoffed at "curealls" and "modestly placed his medicines before the public." He gave away 10,000,000 free samples of "Boschee's" and 2,400,000 samples of "August Flower." Five million almanacs went forth from Green's each year to advertise the products.

Hundreds of Woodbury residents secured work in the spreading Green enterprises and George prospered greatly. He built a huge hotel in Pasadena, Cal., and a big Summer home at Lake Hopatcong. George G. Green became one of South Jersey's biggest men; in Woodbury he was all. The town's biggest night took place annually when Green's 19 salesmen came home to a meeting at Green's house (to which they wore high silk hats and swallow-tail coats). Each year, before the Greens left for Pasadena, the fam-



"Kota" or primitive dwelling of the first settlers who drifted across the Delaware from "New Sweden" to found what is now Gloucester County.

ily's private "palace car" stood on a siding with all townsfolk invited to go through at their convenience.

(Eventually the patent medicine business declined; today several smaller concerns occupy the big Green factory and only a handful of employees work in the Green company.)

OUT on the Delaware River, where shad fishing had brought wealth and health to scores of fishermen, big business grew, too. At Gibbstown, Lamot du Pont of the noted Wilmington du Pont enterprises bought a farm in 1880 and built the largest dynamite plant in the world.

For months Lamot and his cousin William, construction boss, rowed almost daily across the wide Delaware to watch the progress of the new plant rising amid the surrounding cornfields. Du Pont initiated features at Gibbstown, which with only minor changes, are standard practice in the explosives field today. Ironically, Lamot du Pont died in March, 1884, in an explosion at the plant.

Some years later, in 1902, the du Pont company opened its Eastern Laboratory at Gibbstown, the beginning of the company's research program and said to be the first industrial research laboratory in the country.

Among hundreds of other developments, the first commercial production of TNT was initiated at Eastern Laboratory.

The last half of the 19th Century saw agriculture reach maturity, particularly in the eastern section of Gloucester where liberal uses of fertilizer turned sandy soil into rich farmlands. Fittingly enough, many of the farms spread over acres of former forest land, which the defunct glass industry had cleared for use as charcoal in its plants. Elsewhere in the pine regions the glass and bog iron industries were blamed for ruining the land; in Gloucester, farmers made the clearings blossom.

GLOUCESTER'S growing pains, which included a new \$75,000 court house started in 1885 and a new \$10,000 span built to replace the covered bridge over the creek in 1891, resulted in a minor revolt in 1890. Angered by the extravagance of the freeholders in boosting the county tax collector's salary from \$250 up to \$500, the people elected a majority of Democrats to the Board of Freeholders in 1890—the only Democratic board in Gloucester's history.

How Gloucester grew, yet remained rural, appears in these headline-mak-

ing items from 1890 to World War I: 1891, John Blake, owner of the Pole Tavern, killed his 1,157-pound hog after a weight-guessing contest which excited all of South Jersey; 1892, Swedesboro got the first mile of stone road in New Jersey under a new state law; 1893, little Woodbury was seventh among New Jersey cities in postal revenues because of the huge volume of mail from Green's Laboratories; 1900, Postmaster Jessup was soundly denounced by merchants because he suggested free home mail delivery (which would mean the end of afternoon window shopping, merchants said); 1900, Dr. Buzby sold his three horses in Swedesboro and bought an automobile; 1911, New Jersey had only 20 miles of turnpike road left—17 of them in Gloucester; 1915, the county bought the seven-mile Woodbury-to-Mullica Hill toll road for \$25,000.

Since 1900 Gloucester's population has almost tripled, from 31,905 to more than 92,000 in 1952. Still, the county's outlook is essentially rural, although Woodbury's life is attuned to its heavy percentage of commuters—who go daily to Camden or Philadelphia, or who work for du Pont or one of the big oil companies in the industrial area stretched along most of the county's Delaware River border.

TODAY there is speculative stirring over what the future holds for Gloucester now that National Steel Co. has purchased 2,800 acres of farmland between Thorofare and the river for a modern steel plant. The county knows that an additional 6,000 acres of farmland will be needed back from the river for housing of workers. Experts say that is just the beginning, predicting that subsidiary plants will come and more farmland will disappear.

That's in the future. Right now Gloucester continues to be a thriving garden patch; more than 51 per cent of its total area is under cultivation, producing vast quantities of peppers, asparagus, market tomatoes, cucumbers and cantaloupes. Gloucester leads New Jersey in all those categories and its total farm income exceeds \$14,000,000 annually. Tomatoes, asparagus and sweet potatoes abound in the areas around Swedesboro and Mullica Hill; peach orchards surround Glassboro.

If industry ever crowds agriculture out, or confines it, Gloucester will be strangely different. Ever since those first Swedes poked up Raccoon Creek 300 years ago the land has been meant for the plow. Reserved, in a way, as a garden patch while elsewhere cities grew—and ate.